Aurora ANIMAL + HOSPITAL
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# Savannah Monitor Care

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**Brief Description**
Savannah monitors some from sub-Saharan Africa and as their name suggests, they inhabit savannah and scrub brush areas. Savannah monitors can reach an impressive size of 3-5 feet and are very strong with a powerful bite. For these reasons in addition to their cost of care, Savannah Monitors are not beginner reptiles. With appropriate care and patient handling, they can become quite docile and be a rewarding animal to own.

**Lifespan**
When Savannah monitors are given appropriate care, they can easily live 10-20 years.

**Sexing**
Young Savannah monitors show no visual differences as hatchlings or juveniles. As they reach sexual maturity, males tend to be larger, more colorful, and hemipene bulges can sometimes be seen at the base of the tail behind the hind legs. But admittedly it is difficult to differentiate gender in even adult savannah monitors. Males will sometimes evert their hemipenes which can be the easiest way to sex them. Females tend to be smaller, duller in color and larger nares than mature males.

**Caging**
Savannah monitors grow rapidly so you will need to plan appropriately for housing that provides what your monitor needs at different stages of its life. Hatchlings start around 6 inches and a 40 gallon will provide your hatchling plenty of space to thermoregulate and move about. A large, adult male can reach 4-5ft in length and will require a minimum space of 3 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet. Most Savannah monitor owners end up making custom cages out of wood in order to provide their space requirements and maintain temperatures and humidity. Sturdy branches can be used as cage furniture, but securing any cage furniture is a requirement for these strong and active lizards.

**Substrate**
Savannah monitors love to dig and providing them with a deep layer of substrate to do so is an important part of their care by allowing them to behave as they would in their native habitats. A mixture of coconut coir, sand, and mulch will help to maintain humidity and will hold its shape as your monitor burrows and digs. Taking steps to ensure that your monitor's substrate doesn't become too wet will reduce the risk of bacterial and fungal growth. Contaminated or dirtied substrate should be replaced. Substrates of newspaper or butcher paper work well for quarantine periods or if your monitor is sick.

**Lighting and Temperature**
Savannah monitors need a warm place to bask (**95-105 degrees**) on one side of the cage in order digest food and nutrients properly. The other side of the cage should be cooler (**80-85 degrees**) so they don't overheat. A thermometer should be placed at both ends of the cage at the level of the animal to accurately measure temperatures. Lights should be on for 10-12 hours each day and then total darkness at night. Night temperatures can safely drop to 70 degrees so a night time heat source is not necessary in most homes.

A common solution for many monitor keepers is to create a Rete's Stack that sits below the basking bulb. This shelf system allows your Savannah monitor to move closer or further from the basking site in order to thermoregulate. Care should be given to protect your monitor from access to hot basking bulbs and prevent burns.

While UVB is somewhat a subject of debate, we have seen multiple savannah monitors develop severe metabolic bone disease it the absence of UVB lighting. For this reason, it is highly recommended. A commercially available UVB bulb is necessary as UVB does not penetrate glass or plastic so having the cage near a window does not work. Look for UVB listed specifically on retail packaging before buying.

- After about 6 months of use most bulbs will stop emitting adequate levels of UVB, even though they are still shining, so it's important to change the bulb every 6 months.

**Humidity**
Though Savannah monitors come from dryer habitats, they spend a significant portion of their lives in burrows where humidity is higher. Dehydration can frequently be a problem for captive Savannah monitors and maintaining humidity around 40-50% in their enclosures will help to prevent problems.

**Water**
Savannah monitors will require a large water bowl for soaking. Rubbermaid bins may become the easiest solution for fully grown monitors. The water will need to be changed frequently to keep it clean of substrate and feces.

**Food**
Savannah monitors are mostly scavengers in the wild and take in a large variety of prey items. They have a high metabolism and it can be surprising how much they can eat! Your monitor should not be fed all that it will eat however because they are very prone to obesity and the resulting health complications like “fatty liver”. Savannah monitors should primarily be fed a variety of gutloaded insects including crickets, superworms, Dubia roaches, and hornworms. Occasional food items like mice, crayfish, chicks or boiled eggs can be offered, but in moderation as these items are very high in fat. Obesity can become a problem for these lizards since they don’t get as much exercise in captivity as they do in the wild and can greatly decrease their longevity.

**Gutloading**
Gutloading is the process of feeding crickets, superworms, and/or dubia roaches a nutritious diet so they can ultimately provide your reptile with the proper nutrients it requires as it would in nature. Supplementing with a calcium and multivitamin powder is important, but not sufficient alone.

Creating a well-rounded gutload at home can seem daunting but can actually be fairly inexpensive and easy to make! Each time you go to the store get one or two staple vegetables on the list above, then rotate them for something else next time. Make sure you wash all produce to eliminate pesticide residues and cut off the peel of fruits and vegetables as they have waxes and pesticides you can't wash off. The time from feeding insects, to your reptile eating those insects, should be 6-24 hours, and gutloading must be done before every feeding to be successful.

| **Staple Ingredients** (Highest in calcium and other nutrients) | | | | | |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Collard Greens | Turnip Greens | Mustard Greens | Escarole | Endive | Dandelion |

| **Good Ingredients** (Use as supplements to staples listed above) | | | | | |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sweet Potato | Papaya | Kale | Butternut Squash | Berries | Mango |
| Commercial gutloads: Repashy Superload, Cricket Crack, Super Chow | | | | | |

| Avoid These Ingredients (Low in calcium and/or high in phosphorus, oxalates, goitrogens) |
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| Idaho potatoes, cabbage, iceberg lettuce, spinach, broccoli, tomatoes, corn, grains, beans, bread, cereal, meat, eggs, dog food, cat food, fish food, canned or dried insects, vertebrates (pinkies, lizards). While convenient, some commercially available gutloads (Farms Orange Cubes, Fluker Farms High Calcium Cricket Diet, Nature Zone Cricket Bites) are low in calcium, imbalanced and/or insufficient for good nutrition. |

**Supplementation**
A powdered calcium supplement (without phosphorus) should be used to lightly coat feeder insects. Calcium and vitamin supplementation is not needed for whole prey items like mice or chicks.